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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the investigation was to observe the relationship between the personality of high school counselors and their interpersonal characteristics. Forty high school counselors responded to the 16PF and 160 senior counselees rated their respective counselors by completing the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory. Moderate relationships were observed. Counselors who were rated high by their counselees on interpersonal characteristics tended to be assertive, happy-go-lucky, venturesome, suspicious (hard to fool), and self-sufficient. Since Rogers (1957) and others include interpersonal characteristics as essential to effective human relations, counselors reaching higher levels of these significant factors tend to have greater success with constructive client outcomes. (Author)

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RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INTERPERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND COUNSELOR PERSONALITY

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RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INTERPERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND COUNSELOR PERSONALITY

Much literature exists indicating that empathic understanding, unconditionality of regard, congruence, and a high level of regard are valid characteristics for a counselor to possess (Barrett-Lennard & Elliott, 1970). Bednar and Weinberg (1970) surveyed twenty-three studies evaluating treatment programs and found that when the treatment consisted of some form of counseling, the higher the therapeutic conditions of empathy, warmth, and genuineness, the more effective the treatment. Fiedler (1950) in a study of therapists from different schools found that their concept of the ideal therapeutic relationship was but a variation of good interpersonal relationships in general.

In reviewing the process of constructive personality change, Rogers (1957) listed six conditions that should exist and among them were the interpersonal characteristics of congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding. Truax and Carkhuff (1967; Carkhuff 1969) found a high degree of nonpossessive warmth, genuineness, and accurate empathy associated with constructive client outcomes and low levels associated with no change or deterioration.

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between personality and interpersonal characteristics. If a

relationship could be established, a personality test could be used as a screening device for counselor trainees and also as a tool for determining areas needing improvement.

Method

Counselors

Forty guidance counselors were selected randomly from a state list of certified counselors. All 40 counselors held a master's degree in guidance and counseling or its equivalent. Of the 40 counselors, all were white, 24 were male, and 16 were female.

TABLE 1

Age and Experience of Counselors

Item	Range	Mean
Female Counselors		
Age	28 - 56	44.4
Years in Education	3 - 43	16.3
Years in Counseling	1 - 12	5.2
Male Counselors		
Age	25 - 60	42.0
Years in Education	3 - 25	13.8
Years in Counseling	2 - 14	5.6

Students

Each counselor provided a list of senior counselees. From each list provided, four counselees were randomly selected for a total of 160 students. These students were asked if they had visited with the counselor in the counseling office during the current school year. On two occasions two students had not been counseled by the counselor. These students were replaced by randomly selecting additional students who had visited their counselor.

Instruments

The Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF) (Cattell & Eber, 1962) was administered to each counselor to obtain 16 measures of relatively permanent features of behavior. The questionnaire is based on a series of interlocking research studies conducted over a 25-year period and directed toward locating unitary, independent, and pragmatically important personality factors (Cattell & Eber, 1970).

The Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory (Barrett-Lennard, 1970) provides four measures of the student's perception of the counselor's interpersonal characteristics. These are labeled level of regard, empathic understanding, unconditionality of regard, and congruence.

Level of regard includes feelings of like versus dislike, patience versus impatience, and affection versus contempt. Empathic understanding involves sensitivity to the client's current feelings and the verbal facility to communicate this

understanding. Unconditionality of regard means warmly accepting the counselee as a person. High unconditionality of regard means the counselee is allowed to have his own feelings and experiencies. High congruence implies that the person is psychologically unthreatened and therefore maximally open to what the other person is communicating. It means the counselor has the capacity to discriminate between his own feelings or attitudes and those of the counselee.

Procedures

Counselors were visited in their schools and asked to participate in a study of the relationship between counselor personality and the way students view the inter-personal characteristics of the counselor. Counselors were promised a summary of the results from their personality tests. In every case, the counselor agreed to participate and the 16PF was administered.

While the counselor was completing the 16PF, four seniors were selected and taken to a separate testing room. They were truthfully told "Your counselor will not see your answers." They were also told that "if you answer each item indicating the way you really feel about your counselor, the information could benefit and improve counseling services." Each senior completed the Relationship Inventory by working individually and without putting his name on the inventory. The counselor was not present while the seniors completed the inventory.

Correlations

Pearson's r was computed as a measure of the relationship between the counselors' scores and the counselees' ratings. The "string-out" method was used where each counselor's score was repeated four times, once for each of the counselees who rated the counselor. This resulted in 160 pairs of scores for each correlation computed. Four of these pairs were associated with each of the counselors. This "string-out" method yields correlations which are smaller in magnitude and thus more conservative than the "summation" method where the sum (or average) of all four counselees is used as the corresponding estimate of a counselor's interpersonal characteristic score.

Results

Results of this study offer tentative evidence of moderate relationships between the 16PF scores and both level of regard and congruence. Also, a relationship was observed between empathic understanding and the 16PF score for self-sufficiency versus group-dependence. No relationship was observed between the 16PF scores and unconditionality of regard.

TABLE 2

Correlations Between Scores on the 16PF and Ratings on the Relationship Inventory

Factor	Low score description	High score description	Level of Regard	Empathic understanding	Unconditionality of regard	Congruence
A	Reserved	Outgoing	.13	.06	.05	.13
B	Less-intelligent	More-intelligent	-.16*	-.13	-.10	-.20*
C	Affected by feelings	Emotionally stable	-.04	-.04	-.09	-.02
E	Humble	Assertive	.17*	.14	-.02	.19*
F	Sober	Happy-go-lucky	.16*	.11	-.05	.19*
G	Expedient	Conscientious	-.05	-.06	-.09	-.11
H	Shy	Venturesome	.16*	.13	-.02	.24*
I	Tough-minded	Tender-minded	.06	.00	-.02	.16*
L	Trusting	Suspicious	.17*	.11	-.01	.16*
M	Practical	Imaginative	-.02	.02	.06	.04

TABLE 2 (continued)

N	Forthright	Shrewd	.13	.04	.07	.05
O	Placid	Apprehensive	.04	.08	-.02	.03
Q-1	Conservative	Experimenting	-.04	-.06	.01	-.10
Q-2	Group dependent	Self-sufficient	.20*	.16*	.06	.17*
Q-3	Undisciplined	Controlled	.01	-.05	.02	-.04
Q-4	Relaxed	Tense	-.04	-.04	-.05	-.02

*$p < .05$

The correlations for factors Q-2 (self-sufficient), E (assertive), and L (suspicious) indicate that counselors who did not need group support were seen by their counselees as having a higher level of regard and as being more congruent.

The correlations for factors F (happy-go-lucky) and H (venturesome) indicate that counselors who were pliable and uninhabited tended to receive higher ratings on level of regard and congruence.

Factor B (intelligence) correlates negatively with counselee ratings. Although the intellectual level of the sample of counselors involved was high, counselors with higher intelligence scores tended to receive lower ratings on interpersonal characteristics.

Discussion

The magnitude of the correlations obtained in this study does not clearly warrant selecting counselors on the basis of personality factors. However, the present findings seem sufficient to suggest conclusions regarding the counselor's role and training.

Under the assumption that interpersonal skills are important, the more desirable counselor is a person who is accustomed to going his own way and who does not have a strong need for the agreement or support of others. One possible rationale for counselees selecting the group-independent counselor is that

the counselee may suspect the group-dependent counselor of "buying" faculty approval by sharing information he has gained from the counselee. Also, a group-dependent counselor may function in such a way as to be seen as defending the school and its established rules and regulations rather than being concerned with the needs of the counselee. An implication for supervisory personnel would be that counselors should not be assigned duties which force them into a role of being group-dependent.

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